

*God's Government of the World a
Ground of Joy to Mankind.*

A
S E R M O N

U P O N

P S A L M xcvii. i.

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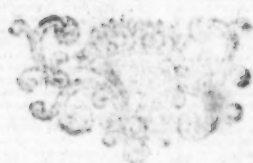
God's Government of the World a
Ground of Joy to Millions

SERMON

UPON

ISAIAH XLV. 1.

By R. W. A. T. A.
Rector of St. George's Church
in St. George's, London.



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PSALM xcvi. 1.

*The Lord reigneth, let the Earth
rejoyce.*

IT is a Point of the highest Moment to Religion and Morality, as well as to our present Peace and Satisfaction, to settle in our Minds right Notions of the Divine Nature and Perfections. For though we cannot by our deepest Researches find out God to Perfection, or trace all the Ways of his Providence; yet he has afforded us so much Light to guide our Enquiries, that, if we duly use and improve it, will be sufficient to bring us to that Knowledge of him, as is needful to our Comfort and Satisfaction here, and our eternal Happiness hereafter.

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The Truth of this cannot be denied without asserting in exprefs Terms that God has not sufficiently provided for the Happiness of his rational Creatures.

As the Light of Nature or Reason, which the Wise Man calls the *Lamp of the Lord*, instructs us that there is a God; by the same Reason we learn that He is a Being *infinitely Perfect*; as he is the Fountain of Being, the Author of all Perfection. What Perfection is, or its Contrary, we as clearly apprehend as we do any Truth. Those Qualities in Beings which command our Esteem and Reverence, which produce Good or Happiness to the Creation; and prevent Evil or Misery—we unavoidably conclude to be Perfections, and that of Consequence they must belong to the supreme Being in the highest Degree.

As Knowledge, Wisdom, Power are Perfections, in various limited Degrees possess'd by created Beings; the Creator and absolutely Perfect Cause of all Things, must possess them in the highest possible Degree. In like Manner Goodness, Justice, Faithfulness and Truth, being Perfections of a Moral kind, universally acknowledg'd such, and ever highly esteem'd in whomsoever they are found, must eminently belong to the Divine Nature, or God is a Being of infinite

a Ground of Joy to Mankind. 5

nite Goodness, Justice, Faithfulness and Truth, as he is a Being infinitely Perfect.

It appearing then a most certain Truth, obvious to the Light of Nature or Reason, that the fore-mention'd Attributes are included in the Notion of a Perfect Being ; from this Consideration there arises evidently just Ground of Joy to Mankind, that the Government of the Universe, the Superintendency of all created Nature, is in the Hand of such a Being.

The Lord reigneth, let the Earth rejoice.

In the following Discourse, I shall confirm and illustrate this general Truth contain'd in the Text ; namely, that the Consideration of the Divine Government is just Matter of Satisfaction and Joy to Mankind.

This I shall do by explaining distinctly those Perfections of God, which belong to the Character of a Perfect Governour.

1. God has infinite Knowledge ; without which his Government would be defective. For were he ignorant of any Transactions in his universal Empire ; if he knew not thoroughly all the Circumstances of every Case, the most secret Springs of every

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every Action, exact Justice could not be administered, nor Rewards and Punishments proportion'd to every one's Deserts. But the Knowledge of God is infinite as his Essence; as he fills and pervades all Things by his boundless Presence; so he cannot but know all Things to which he is intimately and essentially present.

Every Action therefore, every Thought must be open unto him; not the most secret Intention can veil itself from his all-piercing Eye; *who understandeth the Thoughts long before*, even before they are form'd in the Mind. And this Knowledge of the Thoughts as well as Actions of Men is evidently necessary, both in God's providential Government here, and in order to his judging the World with Equity hereafter.

2. Another Perfection necessary to a Perfect Government is Wisdom. Now as an infinite or omnipresent Mind must know all Things to which he is present; and as the Creator of all Things must know all the Powers and Capacities of the Things he has created; hence he must be able to judge what in every Respect is best and fittest to be done. For seeing every possible Circumstance and Relation of Things one to another, and their Fitness to certain Ends, he must infallibly understand what is best and fittest in every possible Case.

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3. Further, The Supreme Governour is invested with infinite Power, with Power to do all Things possible in the Nature of Things, and which are not repugnant to any other Perfections. To make a Part greater than the whole, to cause that a Thing should be and not be at the same Time, that the same numerical Body should be in two distinct Places at once.—These are absolute Contradictions in the Nature of Things, and therefore not the Objects of Power.

Neither is the Power of God to be suppos'd to extend to such Actions as are repugnant to his essential Perfections, or to such Things as are morally Evil; for moral Evil implies Imperfection; God therefore cannot commit it, as he is infinitely Perfect. He cannot do any Thing that is unjust, any Thing that is cruel, any Thing contrary to Promise: He cannot, for Instance, create any Being with Design of making him finally miserable; he cannot hate or punish us for any Thing previous to our own wilful Act or Demerit; he cannot require of us impossible Terms of Salvation:—These are plain and undeniable Instances of Injustice and Cruelty; are repugnant to all the Notions we can frame of Goodness in any Being; they create Horror and Detestation in every Understanding; and cannot there-

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therefore possibly have Place in a most perfect Being.

So that tho' the Power of God be strictly infinite, it cannot include Things impossible and contradictory in Nature, or Things inconsistent with the Attributes of Wisdom, Justice, Goodness and Truth, which essentially and necessarily belong to a Being absolutely Perfect, as I have already shown.

And this Doctrine concerning the Divine Power, and the Distinction between what *is*, and what is *not* the Object of Power, or what *is*, or is *not* consistent with other Perfections, is very necessary to be carefully attended to. Because erroneous Notions of God's Power have created, not only numberless Superstitious Fancies, and monstrous Absurdities in Speculation, (happy for Mankind had they proceeded no further!) but have had a most malignant Influence upon Practice.

Among all those Monsters of Tyranny and Cruelty, whom God has permitted in his unsearchable Judgments to oppress the People, whose Well-being was the sole End of appointing any Governours at all; many, 'tis not improbable, have gone into arbitrary Measures from that erroneous and pernicious Principle, that Power
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and *Authority* are but different Names for the same Thing; and have justified to themselves the Violation of good Laws, the Breach of solemn Engagements, and the most unreasonable and arbitrary Exercise of their Power, under a Notion or Pretence of being invested with an absolute and uncontrollable Authority, above all Law or Restraint whatsoever; and that herein they represent the Monarch of the Universe, whose unbounded Power alone they suppose is the Measure of his Conduct; *who doth according to his Will in the Army of Heaven, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth, and none can stay his Hand, or say unto him, what doest thou?* Dan. iv. 35. Now had these Persons attended to the mere Light of Nature only, they must have learnt that the true Glory and Perfection of a Governour, is not to let loose the Reins to an arbitrary and capricious Will, and act by the blind Impulse of giddy Fancy, fantastical Pride or Ambition; but to make Reason and just Laws the invariable Rule of his Government; and that the free Obedience of Subjects is much more for his Honour, than the forc'd Submission of Slaves:—Had these Maxims of Government been taught them, and early form'd in their Minds, they might probably have fram'd their Conduct agreeably thereto. But however that might have been; it manifestly follows from the single Consideration of a Perfect Governour (and it cannot be too much inculcated) that the Supreme Being,

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tho',

tho' cloath'd with infinite Power, yet never exerts his Power in an *arbitrary Manner*, in the Sense we understand the Word *Arbitrary* when applied to Men. If this could be suppos'd, it would follow that he might act unreasonably, unjustly, and cruelly. For it is utterly inconceivable that *Power* alone should alter the *Nature* of Actions; should make an Action just and good in one Being, which would be unjust and cruel in another. We conclude therefore, that the Divine Power is inseparably connected with, and acts in perfect Harmony with Wisdom, Justice, and Goodness; and that 'tis as impossible for God ever to exert his Power contrary to the unalterable Rule of Reason, or to the Destruction of his other Attributes, as it is to destroy his very Being itself, or to cease to be God. When therefore God is said in Scripture, *to do according to his Will in the Army of Heaven, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth*,—the Expression, of *doing according to his Will*, cannot signify, as it does among Men, acting according to *Will* without *Reason*; but acting according to an immutably perfect Will, ever influenc'd by the clearest Reason, invariably dispos'd, without Possibility of any wrong Bias to do what is Right and Fit in the Nature of Things. Among earthly Governours 'tis too notorious that Will and Reason frequently signify the most opposite Things in Nature. On which account Absolute Power, among Beings prone to deviate from Reason, is very justly dreaded;

dreaded; and every Approach to such a Power cannot be too carefully guarded against.

And if infinite Power could be supposed to be in the Hands of an unsteady and mutable Being, which might be the Case, for ought we could prove to the contrary, were Power alone the Foundation of all Government, as has been contended; such an Idea of the Supreme Disposer of our Lot would be so far from Matter of Joy to us, that it would be a far more terrible Consideration than the most potent Tyranny upon Earth. Since *Dominion* founded in *Power*, or a Right to do whatever Omnipotence alone, separate from Justice and Goodness, could do; notwithstanding our best Endeavours to please our Maker, might make us finally miserable. If it were so; then would the Psalmist with far more Reason have said, *The Lord reigneth, let the Earth mourn and be disconsolate; let the Inhabitants of the World tremble, and be horribly afraid.* Then should all, even the best of Men, have Cause to wish, that they had never been called into Being; since their Happiness would, on such a Supposition, be most uncertain and precarious.

But, to our great Comfort, we have the firmest Ground of Assurance that this can never possibly be our Case: That we have to do with a Being, whose Government is founded in eternal Truth;

whose Power is directed by unerring Wisdom, everlasting Goodness and unalterable Rectitude of Will: which indeed is just Ground of Terror to obstinate and irreclaimable Sinners, but of great Satisfaction and Joy to those who endeavour by a Life of Virtue to secure his Favour.

4. I proceed, fourthly, to the Attribute of Goodness, which compleats the Character of a Being infinitely amiable, making him the Object of our Hope and Love, as well as of our Fear and Reverence. Other Perfections consider'd separate from Goodness would create Fear and Amazement, more than Joy or Love, in Beings compass'd with Infirmities, and prone to offend. It is Goodness tempering the Rigor of Justice that must be our last Sanctuary or Refuge. For if *the Lord should be extreme to mark what is done amiss, who may abide?* The Contemplation of this Attribute can alone give us perfect Rest and Tranquillity of Mind; releasing us from ill-boding Thoughts and anxious Doubtfulness concerning our everlasting State.

The Goodness of God therefore challenges above all his Perfections the Tribute of a joyful and thankful Heart.

5. Lastly,

5. Lastly. The most High God is Just as well as Wise, Powerful, and Good. Justice is essentially requisite in all Government; and as without Goodness Supreme Dominion and Power, tho' steer'd with Justice, would be apt to create even in the best of Men Fears and Suspicions instead of Hope and Comfort: so without Justice the very End of Government, the Support of Virtue and Discouragement of Vice by suitable Rewards and Punishments, would be defeated. The Justice of God consists in his dealing with his Creatures in exact Proportion to their Moral Qualifications; in punishing Crimes according to the Degrees of their Malignity with suitable Degrees of Punishment; in conferring greater Rewards upon greater Improvements in Virtue and Goodness. For tho' it may be a Question whether Justice was originally concerned in bestowing Heaven even upon sinless Creatures, since they would be still unprofitable Servants, and could therefore have no Claim of *Merit*: Yet in Consequence of a free Promise, sincere Obedience is entitled to a Reward in Heaven; and the Justice and Faithfulness of God are a firm Security that he will bestow it. *Of a Truth (says St. Peter) I perceive that God is no Respector of Persons; but in every Nation, he that feareth him, and worketh Righteousness, is accepted with him.*

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The Application of this Discourse is as follows.

If He who is Sovereign of universal Nature, though cloath'd with unbounded Power, and accountable to none in the Exercise of it,—deigns notwithstanding to steer his Power by invariable Rules of Justice ; appealing even to Men to judge of the Equity of his Ways—If He never exerts his Power to the Destruction of any of his Creatures, but when incorrigible Wickedness makes it necessary ; nor inflicts any temporal Evil, but for the Correction and Amendment of *others*, in order to their greater final Good : But his Delight is to exercise Loving-Kindness, Judgment and Righteousness in the Earth.—Then ought his Representatives, Kings, and inferior Magistrates to make him their Pattern in the Exercise of that Authority which is committed to them, in promoting according to their Ability the Welfare of that *Body* over which they preside ; remembering the End of the Trust reposed in them, and the great Aggravation of misapplying it.

They cannot, 'tis certain, imitate the Lord of the Universe in many of his Perfections. In Extent and Infallibility of Knowledge, in the Wonders of his Power, in the Depth of his unfathomable

fathomable Wisdom, they cannot approach to any Resemblance of him. But in his Moral Perfections of Justice, Goodness and Truth, they may and ought to resemble him, and it will be their great Condemnation in the Day of final Retribution, when a just and impartial Sentence shall pass upon all, without Regard to Persons; if they are without these Qualifications, and have made it none of their Concern to imitate herein their great Original,

Where-ever the Vices opposite to these Virtues happen to prevail, and the Supreme Authority is lodged in One of boundless Ambition or Avarice; whose Temper is tyrannical and cruel, prone to Revenge, or full of Treachery or Malice: under no Restraint of Religion or Conscience; nor curb'd by Laws from a full Indulgence to every vicious Inclination—It is needless to observe that such a Government must be so far from a Blessing, that in Proportion to the Extent of its Power it must be a more extensive Mischief, and indeed the most dreadful Evil that could fall upon a Nation.

It is well known that this has been the unhappy Condition of some Nations in former Times: and is at this Day too near a Description of some Countries where an Arbitrary Power is set up; which instead of protecting the People,
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and vindicating their Wrongs (the great End for which Government was appointed) is employed chiefly to oppress them, to make Havock of their Fortunes, their Liberties, and their Lives.

No Person that has any Remains of Humanity can even read of the Cruelties of a *Nero* or *Caligula*, without being deeply moved for the unhappy Sufferers, and without the highest Indignation against the Tyrants. And we cannot but be amaz'd that Human Nature, created in the Image of God, could be ever capable of so monstrous a Depravation, as to become the express Resemblance of that accursed Spirit who is the Author of all Evil; and whom St. *John* emphatically styles *The * Destroyer*, and St. *Peter* *The † Adversary*, who, as a roaring Lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour.

But it must still greatly increase our Amazement, to read of Cruelties equalling even their's, who were the vilest of Heathen Infidels, and the greatest Reproach to Reasonable Beings; practis'd by those who call themselves Christians, nay the only true Christians; and *this* under the Pretence of Religion, and of doing Service to the Church of God. The Massacre of the Protestants in *France* and ~~England~~, the Inquisitions of *Spain* and *Portugal*, the horrid Cruelties practis'd in this

Ireland

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* Rev. ix. 11.

† 1 Pet. v. 8.

Kingdom in the Reign of Queen *Mary*; the many other grievous Persecutions on Account of Religion, exceeding even the Cruelties of Heathen Persecutors, are notorious Instances of this Truth. Whole Nations to this Hour are subject to an insupportable Tyranny over their Civil and Religious Rights: Many are tied to the hard Necessity of renouncing their Reason and very Senses, and prostituting their Consciences, by complying with gross Idolatry, and most abominable Superstitions; or of submitting to Chains, Imprisonments, lingering Tortures and Death.

That we of the present Age experience none of these Miseries, but enjoy the Blessings of Liberty, and the Protection of good Laws; ought it not to awaken us into a lively and most affectionate Sense of that kind Providence, which has often wonderfully preserv'd this Kingdom from the restless Attempts of our implacable and perfidious Enemies? A truly grateful Sense of the Mercies we have receiv'd, and of the many Blessings we have long enjoy'd under a mild and Protestant Government, will make us careful to deserve new Instances of the Divine Mercies, and the Continuance of former Blessings; by reforming our Lives, shewing mutual Charity, and treating Men of different Persuasions with that Humanity and Gentleness, which are peculiar Characters of that pure and peaceable Religion

we profess; and of the Disciples of that Master whose great Commandment was, that we *love one another*. Upon other Terms than these, it were a Presumption in us, to expect that Providence, who in Times past so signally interpos'd in behalf of this Nation, will again protect us from those great Calamities of a Popish and Arbitrary Government, which now threaten us again in still more dreadful Circumstances than ever.

The Suppression of the last unnatural Rebellion, promoted by Profess'd Protestants in favour of a Popish Pretender, whom they had abjur'd: And the Defeat of a former Attempt to subvert our happy Constitution, by bringing to the Throne a Prince of glorious Memory—These great Deliverances ought to endear to us a Protestant and Legal Government under a Prince, who both by Inclination and Principle has ever appear'd most ready to promote the Welfare of his People, and has not in a single Instance made any Attempt upon the Right of any Person whatsoever.

These Blessings we enjoy in Consequence of the Revolution, and the Act then pass'd for limiting the Regal Succession to a Protestant Family.

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That this was the only possible Means (without a Miracle) of preserving our Religion, Liberties and Laws, and of preventing all the Miseries which must otherwise have come upon this Nation, is evident : And that this Expedient for the Preservation of our Natural and Legal Rights was just and lawful in the Sight of God, would, I think, be no less evident to the general Sense and Reason of Mankind ; had not weak or designing Men by Objections specious at first Sight to short Apprehensions ; and by Texts of Scripture strain'd and divided from their Context, or misapplied ; rais'd a Cloud before the Eyes of many, which remains even to this Day, notwithstanding the Light afforded them, and the unanswerable Reply to every Single Objection, by One of the greatest Ornaments of the Christian Church that this or any Age has produc'd,

That a Nation, whose Government is limited by Laws, confirm'd by the Supreme Legislative Power ; has a Right to defend those Laws against any Man's Attempt to destroy them, and together with them the Liberty and Happiness of a whole People — that in these Circumstances at least a Nation has a Right of Self-Preservation, is so clear a Principle of the Law of Nature ; that no pretended Authority of a Reveal'd Law can be admitted in Prejudice of it. For a Re-

velation coming from God cannot destroy a Law of Nature, which has God equally for its Author; and which, as being founded in eternal Truth, or the immutable Reason of Things, can never cease to be a Law.

That the Subjection St. Paul requires to the Higher Powers, is a Subjection to Governours executing their Trust, and acting agreeably to the End of their Institution; and not a Submission to the Arbitrary Will of Tyrants, acting in defiance of all Law and Reason; is so apparent from the seven first Verses of the thirteenth Chapter to the *Romans*; that one cannot but wonder any could read the whole Passage, and at the same Time alledge St. Paul's Authority for an absolute Submission to Princes, attempting to subvert that Constitution which they had solemnly engag'd to support, and for the Support of which alone they were invested with their high Trust.

It is presum'd that all those at least who profess and esteem the Reform'd Religion, (*the Religion of the Gospel*;) or that value the secure Enjoyment of their Properties, whatever their Religion is; or should they be little solicitous about the last Particular—are, by this Time, sensible of their Happiness under the present Government; and of the many Miseries that must unavoidably fall upon this Nation, should the Attempts of our

common Enemy ripen into Success. The Consequences of a Popish Government supported by an Arbitrary Power, have been sufficiently represented in their true Colours, including every Evil that can be the Object of our Abhorrence, or our Dread; and which, humanly speaking, will be unavoidable, should Popery ascend the Throne.

These Things have been shown by unanswerable Reasons, which might awaken the Unthinking into a just Sense of their Danger; and convince (we might hope) those among us who appear to entertain too favourable Sentiments of the Church of Rome. Experience sufficiently taught our Ancestors what Popery then was; and we may appeal to the same experimental Proofs, what it is in foreign Countries at this Day. God forbid that we, or our Posterity should come to know it by the same Means! Wherefore as we hope for his Almighty Protection against that Torrent of Calamities which now threatens our Country, and which, for our many heinous Iniquities, we have too much Cause to fear as a just Punishment coming upon us: Let us, in a deep Sense of our great Unworthiness, apply to the Throne of Mercy; and with all Sincerity of Heart renounce every evil Way. So shall we convince the World, by the Light of our Example, much more than by the loudest Professions, that we have indeed a Zeal for that Holy Reli-

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Religion we profess. And we may then in humble Confidence expect, that God will prosper our righteous Cause, blast the Designs of our Enemies, and secure the Crown to his present Majesty, and to a Succession of Protestant Princes to latest Generations.

*Now unto the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible:
To the only Wise God, be Honour and Glory,
Dominion and Power both now and evermore.*

S. I. N. I. F.

Religion we profess. And we may then in humble Confidence expect, that God will prosper our righteous Cause, blast the Designs of our Enemies, and secure the Crown to his present Majesty, and to a Succession of Protestant Princes to latest Generations.

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